

A newsletter for the
school community

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RIDE *to School*

Rhode Island Department of Education

Our School-Performance Categories: A Call to Action

Dear Educators and Parents:

This has been a tremendously busy and exciting season for everyone involved in public education in Rhode Island. With four years of data in hand, this year, for the first time, we published our list of school-performance categories. Now, we educators and everyone else in the public knows which of our schools are performing well and which are not. Perhaps more important, we know which schools are improving and which must pick up the pace.

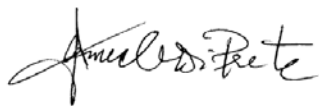
As we have said many times, the list of school-performance categories is not only a wake-up call. It is a call to action.

Members of the RIDE staff have begun a series of meetings with representatives of each of the 20 districts that have low-performing schools. At these meetings, we're putting all our information on the table. Each school is different, and we're trying to see exactly what barriers have prevented each low-performing school from reaching high standards.

We are working with the districts to develop detailed plans to improve school performance. These plans must be submitted to RIDE by May 1st—and they will affect life in the schools right away. Improving our schools cannot wait.

So far, the reaction has been exceptional. Since embarking on this course, we have received words of support and encouragement from many quarters—from parents, legislators, the media, and of course from our fellow educators. No one knows better than the teachers how hard it can be to move all of our students toward proficiency. But it can be done and it is being done, in schools all across the state, urban and suburban, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. And that's something that all of us can celebrate.

Sincerely,



James A. DiPrete, Chairman
Board of Regents



Peter McWalters
Commissioner



James A. DiPrete,
Chairman



Peter McWalters,
Commissioner

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High School Summit Considers Range of Reforms



More than 100 people, including students, teachers, parents, members of the General Assembly, and representatives from state's colleges and universities and RIDE, came together on Friday, March 8th, at the Radisson Airport Hotel, in Warwick, for the state's second High School Summit.

During the day-long session, the participants surveyed the progress made over the past two years by the state's public high schools, discussed ways to better understand the challenges facing the high schools, and took the first steps toward creating a model plan for high-school improvement.

The summit was guided by a series of recommendations from the Board of Regents, which were drafted by the Regents' High School Restructuring Committee. The regents had asked the participants at the summit to focus on three aspects of high-school reform: improving literacy, enriching graduation requirements, and taking steps to redesign high schools so that they become more attentive to the needs of individual students.

"We want to recognize the individuality of schools and yet have a common understanding for every student who graduates from a high school in Rhode Island," Colleen Callahan, chair of the High School Restructuring Committee, told the summit participants. "We need to think about how we can make schools more personal for kids and about forging relations with the business community. We need to think about the high-school entry year and the exit year, to re-value that senior year for students." continued on page 4

Commissioner Tells General Assembly: We Need to Fix Our Schools

In his fifth annual State of Education Address, delivered on March 5th to a joint session of the General Assembly, Peter McWalters told the state's lawmakers that our elementary schools are performing well—but our high schools need help.

"We need to fix our high schools," the education commissioner said, because "most high schools, as they are currently organized, simply cannot meet the challenge" of educating all students.

He informed the legislators that he intends to meet with a wide range of constituents to discuss "the way we do business in high schools."



"Urban elementary schools are beating the odds."

Peter McWalters

On the brighter side, McWalters reported encouraging results from the state's elementary schools: nearly half of the elementary schools are high performing and nearly half are improving.

He noted that many urban elementary schools are improving in all subject areas, and he cited four schools in particular: the Carl G. Lauro School, the Sackett Street School, and the Vartan Gregorian School at Fox Point, in Providence, and the Maisie E. Quinn School, in West Warwick. Those four schools are the only ones in the state to improve in every single test.

"Urban elementary schools are beating the odds," McWalters said.

The most enthusiastic applause during his 27-minute address came when he said he would not bow to pressure to lower the state's proficiency standards, when he said he would insist on testing all students, and when he said: "We should all feel proud of the performance of our elementary-school students and the teachers that support them."

Face-to-Face with David Abbott

RIDE Steers Districts Toward School Improvement

David V. Abbott is the interim assistant commissioner. Along with Todd Flaherty, the deputy commissioner, he is responsible for the organization and oversight of RIDE’s Progressive Support and Intervention efforts. Now that RIDE has placed each school into a performance category, it is conducting “face-to-face” meetings with every school district that has a school identified as low performing.



What is the purpose of the “face-to-face” meeting?

A major underlying purpose of the assessment system is to provide schools and school districts with information about teaching and learning. RIDE sees school improvement as a system of self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The school-performance categories are based on assessment data, which in turn play an important role in a district’s school-improvement efforts. The face-to-face meeting gives a district the opportunity to inform RIDE about its school-improvement strategies. Though we understand that change must occur at the building level, we also believe that positive change cannot be sustained without support from the district and the state. These meetings will entail a review of available information about the school and its relationship with the district. RIDE will work with district leadership to identify any barriers that hinder implementation of school-improvement efforts and to determine where RIDE can support the district’s efforts to help its schools improve student performance in the English-language arts and mathematics.

Who attends the “face-to-face” meeting?

RIDE has asked each school district to be represented by the superintendent, assistant superintendent or curriculum director, school-committee chair or designee, and labor leadership, as well as directors of pupil services and school improvement, as appropriate. Individual schools are represented by the principal and chair of the School Improvement Team, at a minimum. RIDE is represented by either the deputy or assistant commissioner, the school-district liaison, a member of the Curriculum and Instruction Field Service Team, special- education liaison, and representatives from the Office of Assessment and the Office of School Improvement and Accountability.

What will happen after the meetings have been completed?

The meetings are the first stage of a larger process. RIDE anticipates that the initial face-to-face meeting will result in an agreement detailing the manner in which the district and school will undertake school improvement. Also the agreement will specify any possible RIDE support. The agreement will probably result in ongoing technical assistance, networking opportunities, and facilitation of professional development and other school-improvement efforts.

Is Progressive Support and Intervention driven by the recent passage of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*?

No. RIDE is developing its system of Progressive Support and Intervention based upon its statutory authority as set forth in Article 31, the Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative. RIDE, however, is tracking the requirements of the newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (*No Child Left Behind*). We intend to create one structure that incorporates state and federal requirements. We are working hard to make our systems and supports more intergrated, more consistent, and easier to use. To that end, we are eagerly awaiting the promulgation of federal regulations for the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Education by the Numbers

School-by-School Performance Results

297
schools
measured

104
high-performing
schools

78
moderately
performing schools

115
low-performing
schools

22
high schools
improving

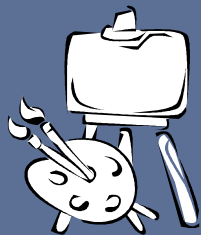
30
high schools
not improving

11
middle schools
improving

43
middle schools
not improving

91
elementary schools
improving

100
elementary schools
not improving



Do you have a favorite poem, essay, or piece of art that one of your students created? * RIDE to School would like to include student works in future issues. Please contact us at: ridetoschool@ridoe.net or 222-4600 ext. 2510

* No originals, please.

Second High School Summit

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Peter McWalters, the commissioner, kicked off the summit by asking the participants to develop plans that would allow for “alternative high schools” that are demanding, based on standards, and subject to assessment. “I don’t want to be the keeper of rigorous standards that say that the only way to get out (of high school) is through a common box,” he said. “Let’s be thinking of exit standards that encourage alternative structures.”

The first High School Summit was held in November 2000, in Newport. After RIDE published its report on that summit, the Board of Regents High School Restructuring Committee held a series of public meetings, including special meetings with high-school principals and with school superintendents, to prepare for the second summit.

Over the next months, the Board of Regents will review the information from the second summit, which may lead to changes in state policy and regulations regarding high schools, to proposals for new legislation, or to budget requests regarding funds for high-school reform.

Recommended Reading:

Recent Books on High School Reform

The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work,

by Linda Darling-Hammond

Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform,

by Michael Fullan

The New Meaning of Educational Change, 3rd Edition,

by Michael Fullan

Doc: The Story of Dennis Littky and His Fight for a Better School,

by Susan Kammeraad-Campbell

Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching,

by Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Joan E. Talbert

The Productive High School: Creating Personalized Academic Communities,

by Joseph Murphy et al.

The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations,

by Peter Senge et al.

The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract,

by Theodore R.Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer

